ECOFEMINIST THOUGHT IN ZULFIYA QUROLBOY QIZI'S AND LOUISE ERDRICH'S STORIES: WOMAN, NATURE, IDENTITY



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Abstract

Ecofeminism holds that the domination of women and the exploitation of nature share a common cultural logic. This paper tests that claim on two bodies of fiction that are seldom read together: the stories of the Uzbek writer Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi and those of the American writer Louise Erdrich, a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. The aim is to show how each author turns ecofeminist concerns into artistic form, and how the relation between woman, nature, and socio-cultural identity is built differently in two cultural settings. The study combines close reading with a comparative method and draws on the work of Val Plumwood, Vandana Shiva, and Paula Gunn Allen. The analysis shows that Qurolboy qizi rarely speaks of nature in programmatic terms. Instead, the village, the yard, the weather, and the seasons form the space in which a woman's silence, labor, and loss become visible. Erdrich, by contrast, treats land as inherited kin and as a contested legal and spiritual territory, so that her women defend place as part of defending their community's identity. Three shared patterns are identified: the female body and the land as objects of claim and use; folk belief and oral memory as carriers of ecological knowledge; and identity as something formed through attachment to place. Qurolboy qizi writes in a quiet, domestic, psychological mode, while Erdrich writes in a political and mythic one. The paper concludes that ecofeminist thought is not a single imported theory but a way of seeing that takes different forms in different cultures. The comparison adds a new dimension to the ecocriticism of Central Asian literature and brings Uzbek women's prose into wider comparative discussion.

Keywords: ecofeminism, Uzbek literature, Louise Erdrich, woman and nature, cultural identity

Introduction

The term ecofeminism was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 [1], and in the decades since it has grown into a wide field with many internal disagreements. Its starting point, however, is simple. The domination of women and the exploitation of nature are not two separate problems. They grow from related structures of thought and power. Val Plumwood described these structures as a logic of domination built on dualisms such as culture and nature, reason and emotion, man and woman, in which the second term is treated as lesser and open to use by the first [2]. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies made

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a similar point from the experience of rural women in the Global South, whose work sustains households and ecosystems yet is rarely counted as work [3]. Karen Warren gave the idea a philosophical form [4], and Carolyn Merchant traced how the image of a living, nurturing nature gave way to the image of a resource to be mastered [5].

Literature is one of the places where such ideas become images. Ecocriticism has taught readers to ask what role the physical environment plays in a text [6; 7], but most ecofeminist readings still concentrate on English-language and European writing. Uzbek prose by women has received little attention from this angle. Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi is a good case for such a study. Critics agree that her stories place the woman and her inner world at the center [8; 9], yet the natural setting around that woman has not been examined as a question in itself. Louise Erdrich, a writer of Ojibwe and German-American descent, offers a revealing counterpart, because her fiction is built on the bond between women, land, and tribal memory.

This paper compares the two writers in order to answer three questions. How does each author connect the woman with the natural world? How does that connection shape the socio-cultural identity of the characters? And where do the two approaches differ, and why? The study uses close reading, thematic analysis, and a comparative method. The American material is drawn from Erdrich's linked fiction, mainly Love Medicine [10], a cycle of connected stories, and Tracks [11], which returns to the same families in an earlier period.

Theoretical Framework

Ecofeminism is not one doctrine. The collection edited by Greta Gaard shows how widely its voices differ, from philosophical to activist [12]. A frequent objection is that some versions assume women are closer to nature by biology, which risks repeating the very dualism they criticize [2; 12]. This paper follows the position that the link is historical and cultural, not natural: women are tied to nature by the way a society assigns them labor, care, and silence. Annette Kolodny showed how the American imagination long pictured land as a woman to be entered and possessed [13], an image that helps in reading Erdrich. Paula Gunn Allen, writing from Laguna Pueblo and Sioux heritage, argued that in many Native American traditions the earth is a living, female-centered source of life and that identity cannot be separated from place [14]. Winona LaDuke, an Anishinaabe activist, ties the survival of Native communities to their land and to the knowledge held in their languages [15].

For the Uzbek material there is no equivalent body of ecofeminist criticism, so the analysis relies on the general framework above and on the cultural habits visible in the texts themselves, such as the common address to the earth as a mother and the ritual respect shown to water and bread.

Cultural and Historical Contexts

The two writers work against very different backgrounds. Qurolboy qizi belongs to a generation that grew up in Soviet Uzbekistan, where cotton monoculture reshaped the countryside and the diversion of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers led to the shrinking of the Aral Sea [16]. Rural women, who did a large share of the hand labor in the cotton fields, supplied the work that kept this system running and bore the daily consequences of dry land and poor water. Erdrich writes from the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) tradition, for which the key history is the allotment of tribal land, which broke up communal holdings, exposed individual plots to taxation, and opened reservations to sale and logging [15]. Where the Uzbek background is one of exploitation inside a single state project, the Native American background is one of dispossession by an outside power. This difference in the form of domination matters for every comparison that follows.

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Woman and Nature in the Stories of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi

Qurolboy qizi's stories are not nature writing in any strict sense. Nature is rarely her subject. What she gives instead is a world in which the woman and her surroundings are in constant contact: the yard that has to be swept, the water that has to be carried, the garden that has to be tended, the weather that decides the mood of a day.

Critics note that the inner life of the woman is the main field of her psychological analysis [8]. From an ecofeminist angle, a second feature deserves attention: the heroine's silence. Her characters often endure loss, humiliation, or loneliness without speaking of it, and the story hands the work of expression to the things around.

The Uzbek cultural frame sharpens the picture. A woman in the traditional family is expected to be patient, to serve, and to hold the household together, and the same adjectives are used for the earth: it gives, it endures, it asks for nothing. When a society praises both for their endurance, it also excuses itself from the duty to care for either. Stories such as "Woman" let the reader see this double expectation without naming it. The identity of the woman as daughter, wife, and mother is shaped inside that frame, and her moments of resistance, small as they often are, are also moments in which she reclaims a relation to place on her own terms.

Land, Kinship, and Resistance in Louise Erdrich's Fiction

Erdrich's fiction is set in and around a North Dakota reservation, and the land in it is never neutral. In Love Medicine [10] the characters carry the history of the reservation in their family quarrels, their marriages, and their journeys between town and home, and the loss of land stands behind much of what happens to them. Tracks [11] goes back to the early twentieth century, when allotment policy and unpaid fees were stripping Anishinaabe families of their holdings, and it makes this loss concrete through one woman, Fleur Pillager.

Fleur's bond with Lake Matchimanito is not sentimental. The lake, with the old spirit that the community fears and respects, is part of her family's inheritance and part of her power. When the land is taken for fees and the forest is opened to loggers, she is shown as a person whose body and whose place are attacked in the same movement. Her answer is not passive. In the closing pages of the novel she leaves, but she leaves in a way that turns the forest itself against those who came to cut it. This is an ecofeminist scene in the full sense: the defense of a woman's dignity and the defense of the land are one act, and both are carried out through knowledge that the colonial order does not recognize.

Erdrich also builds identity through voice. Tracks is told by two narrators, Nanapush, who keeps the oral memory of the community, and Pauline, who turns away from her Anishinaabe roots toward a harsh form of Catholicism. Their opposing relations to the story of the land become opposing relations to who they are [11]. Love Medicine shows the same attachment in modern form, as families who live partly in town still measure themselves by their relation to the reservation [10].

Three Points of Comparison

The first shared pattern is the treatment of the female body and the land as things that others feel entitled to use. In Qurolboy qizi this entitlement is domestic and quiet: it appears as the expectation that a woman will give her strength, her time, and her silence to the household without return, as the earth gives its harvest. In Erdrich it is legal and violent: land is surveyed, taxed, and taken, and women's bodies are exposed to the same hostile gaze. Kolodny's observation that land was imagined as female and therefore as available [13] fits Erdrich's historical setting directly. For the Uzbek stories it fits in a looser sense,

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since what is imagined as available is the woman's own endurance. In both cases the story exposes a hierarchy that its characters have been taught to see as natural.

The second pattern concerns knowledge. Both writers show that women hold forms of ecological understanding that official culture neither records nor values. In Qurolboy qizi it takes the shape of practical habits, proverbs, and the inherited etiquette of household and garden. In Erdrich it takes the shape of oral history, kinship ties to the lake and the woods, and a sense of obligation toward places that have names and histories [11; 14]. The difference is one of scale. The Uzbek stories keep this knowledge inside the family, while Erdrich's fiction presents it as a communal archive that a whole people has to defend. Yet in each case memory carries ethical weight: to forget how to treat the land or the water is also to lose a piece of oneself.

The third pattern is the making of identity. Socio-cultural identity in the two bodies of work is not a fixed label. It is built through attachment to place and tested when that attachment is threatened. Qurolboy qizi's heroines define themselves against the roles of daughter, wife, and mother, and their small acts of independence often involve reclaiming some corner of the physical world. Erdrich's characters define themselves against a history of displacement, and the choice to stay, return, or leave the land becomes a choice about who they are. Pauline's break with her community and Fleur's refusal to give up her ground are two answers to the same question [11].

The differences deserve equal attention. Qurolboy qizi works in a psychological and domestic register, and her ecological thought remains implicit. Erdrich works in a political and mythic register, and her ecological thought is explicit and tied to a history of colonization. It would be a mistake to press one writer into the pattern of the other. The comparison is most useful as a way of seeing how the same underlying link, between the treatment of women and the treatment of the earth, appears in a Central Asian village setting and in a Native American community with a different history, a different religion, and a different relation to the state.

Conclusion

The comparison supports three conclusions. First, ecofeminist thought can be found in Uzbek women's prose even where the writer never uses the term. Qurolboy qizi's stories show it through the unequal distribution of labor and attention that surrounds both woman and land. Second, Erdrich's work shows that where the history of land loss is explicit, ecofeminist ideas become inseparable from questions of cultural survival [13; 15]. Third, the two writers together suggest that ecofeminism is better understood as a way of reading relations of domination than as one fixed theory imported from the West. Further work could extend the comparison to other Central Asian women writers and to Indigenous authors from other regions, and could test whether the three patterns identified here hold across a wider corpus. The two literatures differ in genre, language, and history, so the comparison is offered as a way of listening to each writer's own images, not as a claim that the two experiences are the same.

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